

“Poor loves. Trained to Empire, trained to rule the waves. All gone. All taken away. Bye-bye, world.”

(*Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* 113)

This chapter aims to undertake a detailed exploration of major themes and techniques in the Cold War novels of John le Carré in the light of ideology and resistance in order to check possible instances of conformity to or deviation from the conventions of spy fiction. To this end, selected Cold War Novels will be examined for possible instances of resistance, opposition or subversion of ideology, specifically relating to a) genre b) nationalism, c) modernity, and d) capitalism, and globalization.

3.01 Establishment and Identity: The Circle and the Square

In retrospect, it may be argued that both John le Carré and George Smiley arrived-in the world at roughly the same time. *Call for the Dead* (1961, hereafter *Call*), the first novel featuring the British spymaster George Smiley, also can be seen to be the first novel published under the pseudonym John le Carré. At the time of the publication of *Call*, David Cornwell (le Carré) is said to have been working as a junior officer of the British Foreign Office at Bonn, possibly as an employee of the British Secret Intelligence Service (Brucoli and Baughman xv). Cornwell’s decision to adopt a pseudonym for his career as a writer of spy fiction ~~can~~ has been seen as an attempt to circumvent the compulsions of the Official Secrets Act, which discourages employees from publishing under their own names (Rao et al 2711). In other words, John le Carré can be considered as much a character created by David Cornwell, as George Smiley is. There are multiple points at which author and persona and fiction may be seen to intersect and interweave (Most, “Hippocratic” 92). This thesis argues that both these characters reflect alternative modes of representing a similar ethical-philosophical perspective, which may be retrieved from literary as well as biographical evidence.

Whereas the reason behind le Carré (born David John Moore Cornwell)’s adoption of a *nom de plume*—vaguely suggesting Norman antecedents and meaning “the square” in French—has not produced any conclusive evidence, this thesis proposes to intervene in the issue. This thesis contends that although the phrase does suggest solidity and soundness (Cobbs 4), it may be viewed more fruitfully as antithetical to

two concepts suggested by Panek. It is interesting that on the one hand, the Square suggests opposition to le Queux—"the line," that is, the tradition of heroic spy fiction he represents—and on the other, to the "Circus", that is, the trope for the British Intelligence Service (MI6) le Carré uses in his Cold War novels (Panek 236). In fact, Abraham Rothberg expands this interpretation to suggest that in le Carré's novels, the intelligence services function as "a microcosm of British society and a metaphor for human life as a whole," on account of its concentration on "power, position, promotion and money." (Rothberg, "Decline" 55). Indeed, David Cornwell's decision to become John le Carré has been interpreted as a categorical rejection of the deceitful world of espionage (Cobbs 182).

Further, against the reading of the square as a finished geometric figure opposed to the line (Panek 236), this thesis contends that implicit in the opposition of the square to the Circus is the concept of the Circle, the symbol of completeness or perfection. It is this "circle" which may be seen being transfigured into the rounded "Circus" in the Cold War novels. Although the location of the MI6 headquarters at Cambridge Circus in London (Panek 248; Wolfe 3) appears to provide a rationale for the metaphor, the use of the word to describe a circumscribed set of government officials involved in clandestine activities makes the ironic narrative intent (Kanfer, "Impudent" 8-9) unmistakable.

It is significant that the insularity and unreliability of this perfect circle, on whose activities the fate of the nation and the "western world" apparently depends, is repeatedly underscored in the early novels. In *The Looking Glass War* (1965) Leclerc, leader of a rival security establishment left over from the World War II, passes this judgment on the Circus:

"They're a curious crowd. Some good, of course. Smiley was good. But they're cheats," he broke out suddenly. "That's an odd word, I know, to use about a sister service, John. Lying's second nature to them. Half of them don't know any longer when they're telling the truth." (*Looking* 41)

To the extent that the truth is considered to be automatically guaranteed by adherence to the principles of "national interest" and the "free world" of capitalism in the conventional spy novel, le Carré's intervention seems to offer a subversive reading of spy fiction.

The Circus in its dealings with the larger circle, the globe, then becomes the focus of John le Carré—“the Square”—who is, by definition, someone uninteresting, and who feels uncomfortable with his situation. That the adoption of this specific persona of a detached, dissenting and dissecting narrator is fundamentally connected both to his ironic narrative focus and his deliberate transgression of genre and ideology, may be made clear through a close examination of le Carré’s Cold War novels.

3.02 Ideology and Genre, in the Cold War Novels of John le Carré

Theoretical formulations of the spy have liberally drawn on Tzvetan Todorov’s conception of the “thriller” (Todorov, “Typology” 140) in foregrounding elements which include a protagonist engaged in a struggle with powerful forces in the process of revealing and defeating a crime (Denning 46), without recourse to the forces of law and order (Priestman, *Crime Fiction* 34). Marty Roth’s contention that the “conspiracy thriller,” which, in a way, subsumes most spy narratives, invests in the tension between an idealized vision of the world and its essentially barbaric material reality (Roth 226), is particularly relevant. This link between barbaric reality and idealized transfigurations of the same in the context of le Carré’s interrogation of modernity bears scrutiny.

It has also been suggested that the spy narrative partakes of elements from the adventure story in focusing on the heroic surmounting of obstacles in the pursuit of a moral mission (Cawelti 39). Specifically with reference to the British spy novel, the typical spy hero has also been identified with the high born Englishman, strong in his ordinariness, where the Celtic aspects of the British identity are subsumed in an insistence on “Englishness” (Atkins 55-56). It can easily be understood from this equation that the traditional spy narrative, especially in the more conventional one featuring a heroic spy as protagonist, the issue of morality is inseparable from the ideology of the nation. This thesis argues that the spy narratives of John le Carré interrogate and invert these conventional ideas regarding the spy protagonist’s heroism and the treatment of moral purpose in the conventional spy novel, and thereby subvert the form itself.

One of the key generic conventions of the heroic spy novel is the lack of moral ambiguity. The spy is ascribed moral value based on an ideological polarity of “us” and “them.” Thus, Dollman, the Englishman suspected of being a German spy in Childers’s *The Riddle of the Sands*, is distinguished from the English sailors Davies and Carruthers on the grounds that the latter are spying *for* England (Childers 86). This attitude may clearly be seen saturated in the ideology of the nation-national interest. As John Atkins puts it, “Carruthers and Davies, Hannay, Okewood, Drummond, and the many agents of Oppenheim and Le Queux, never had any doubts. And they retained their enthusiasm” (Atkins 154). The spy hero, consequently, becomes a representation of an ideological bias that implicates the author as well. Andrew Rutherford observes that the spy protagonist in conventional spy fiction of the early twentieth century “has a total confidence, shared by the author, in the rightness of his own cause and the wrongness of the enemy’s” (Rutherford “Spy” 13).

The ideology of moral superiority of the Capitalist West is variously underscored and subjected to ironic interrogation in le Carré’s early novels, as in this instance from *The Spy who Came in from the Cold* (1963), where Control, the Circus chief, offers it as an argument:

Thus we do disagreeable things, but we are *defensive*. That, I think, is still fair. We do disagreeable things so that ordinary people here and elsewhere can sleep safely in their beds at night. Is that too romantic? (*Cold* 17; emphasis in original)

Le Carré’s ironic deflation of the same is of course though the eventual revelation of the wanton way in which the lives of Leamas and Liz are gambled and lost on the battlefield of ideology.

Given their portrayed role in creating consent, disseminating ideology, and ruthlessly obliterating dissent both the Circus and its mirror image, “Moscow Centre,” may be seen operating as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) (Althusser 143-145). The ethical equivalence is underscored in an exchange between Leamas and the “decent” East German spy Fielder:

"I myself would have put a bomb in a restaurant if it brought us farther along the road. Afterwards I would draw the balance—so many women, so many

children; and so far along the road. But Christians—and yours is a Christian society—Christians may not draw the balance." (*Cold* 139)

When Leamas claims the right of self defense for his side, Fielder articulates the paradox at the heart of le Carré's ideological critique:

"But they believe in the sanctity of human life. They believe every man has a soul which can be saved. They believe in sacrifice." (*Cold* 139)

Le Carré uses a particularly caustic irony to repeatedly reveal the disjuncture between what Roth calls the barbaric reality and its idealized transfigurations, as spies like Leamas fall frequent victims to the Circus's contempt for human life in the Cold War novels. Here then, we see le Carré's art being vested with the potential of revealing the contradictions within the ideology that gives birth to it (Althusser 270), and thereby acting as a catalyst in social transformation. Also, in another way, far from being the "tosh fiction" Sutherland dismissively supposes bestselling genre fiction to be (Sutherland 3) le Carré's fiction becomes a reminder rather of Bakhtin's insistence on the self-contestatory element inherent to all genres. Even as the Cold War creates a culture of heightened ruthlessness that permeates the spy novel, its generic conventions are modified to accommodate an occasional discussion on the motivations or morality of espionage. In fact, Rutherford argues, not only does the ideology of nation remain entrenched, but the reader frequently becomes implicated in the discourse of "justified violence in the higher national interest," often reacting "with a frisson of delighted horror" (Rutherford "Spy" 15). Le Carré's deviation from this set pattern of moral certitude in his Cold War novels, while revealing the tensions underlying the form, also enact one of the most significant subversions of the generic code.

A point that needs a bit of attention here is the relationship between Smiley and his creator, seen among others by Cobb (Cobb 30). Though George Smiley features in the first two novels by le Carré, it is only with the third novel, *The Spy who Came in from the Cold* (1963; hereafter *Cold*) that both the character and the author begin to command the reader's interest. The effect of le Carré's first serious resistance of genre can be seen in the subversion of moral purpose in this novel. It occurs early in the narrative, in an exchange between Control, the chief of the Circus, and his field agent Leamas, where the former describes an East German spy they apparently need to neutralize:

"He is a very distasteful man. Ex Hitler-Youth and all that kind of thing. Not at all the intellectual kind of Communist. A practitioner of the cold war"

"Like us," Leamas responds. Control does not smile (*Cold* 19).

Yet the clearest rejection of the moral certitude occurs in the penultimate chapter, as a sort of summing up:

What do you think spies are: priests, saints and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you think they sit like monks in London, balancing the rights and wrongs? (*Cold* 246)

The impact of these words from John le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* upon the British reading public can only be judged in the context of the extant "imaginary" of the spy or secret agent in September, 1963, the time of its publication. *Dr. No*, the first cinematic adaptation of Ian Fleming's iconic work, with the Scottish actor Sean Connery in the lead role, was released a year earlier in the United Kingdom and a few months earlier in the United States. The sudden spurt in the sale of Fleming's books has been documented, and as has been the subsequent worldwide popularity of the film (Bennett and Woolcott, "Moments" 22). The film seems to concretize the spy as a trope for heroic white masculinity: glamorous, extraordinarily capable, and sexually desirable. In this, the film can be said to be only building on, and adding to, an already existing fantasy from a long tradition of literary spies—"fictional favourites" (Atkins 90)—in the novels of John Buchan, 'Sapper' McNeile, Manning Coles and Fleming himself. It is this reproduced image of the heroic and glamorous spy—variously made available and rendered intimate for the consumer through paperbacks, posters and the moving image of cinema—that le Carré attacks and erodes through the depiction of his protagonists. The generally accepted image of the debonair spy is rather pointedly alluded to in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, where Leamas's unglamorous appearance, after his initial return from the field to a desk job, is greeted with consternation:

The debutante secretaries, reluctant to believe that Intelligence Services are peopled by ordinary mortals, were alarmed to notice that Leamas had become definitely seedy.

(le Carré *Cold* 24)

Here, what is being hinted at is identical with the concerns of both Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord regarding the power of specular reproductions to influence and distort reality (Benjamin 216-17; Debord 5). Given the hiatus between the first Bond film and the publication of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, it is possible to suggest that le Carré responds as much to the cinematic image of Bond as to its literary source.

The Spy Who Came in from the Cold can thus be seen intervening at this point to present an alternative trope of the secret agent that opposes and subverts the Bond figure in every way. Given that le Carré draws upon existing models drawn from Conrad and Maugham, his revival of essentially pre World War prototypes can still be read as being remarkably self-conscious, as his secret agent protagonists in the Cold War novels are—like his own adopted persona—misfit ‘squares’ in the world of the glamorous spy. Le Carré’s use of ‘traitors’ in the context of spies in general undercuts the notion of a heroic agent who engages in action, as Fleming phrased it, “*On Her Majesty’s Secret Service*” (1963). Also, the word “pansies” can be seen strategically demolishing the discourse of triumphant and heterosexual masculinity inscribed into the genre of spy fiction until that time. One only needs to recall Fleming’s treatment of homosexuality in *Goldfinger* to comprehend the thorough quality of le Carré’s hatchet job. Moreover, the absolute denial of moral agency in the figure of the spy, which both begins and ends the passage from the novel cited above, indicates le Carré’s own ethical and spiritual bearings.

Another aspect of the heroic spy trope is the protagonist’s “bodily endurance” (Hepburn 5), or infinite capacity to endure physical discomfort, together with superior skills at physical combat. The final scenes in *Call for the Dead*, which involve a fatal quayside struggle between Smiley and the German spy Frey, may be seen as another instance of le Carré’s deliberate subversion of genre conventions. The description of the struggle itself, especially the agency of the spy hero Smiley in defeating the enemy, is constantly undermined through a series of insinuating phrases:

Smiley ran at him *blindly*, forgetting what *little skill he had ever possessed*, swinging with *his short arms*, striking with *his open hands*. His head was against Dieter's chest and he pushed forward, punching Dieter's back and sides. *He was mad* and, discovering in himself *the energy of madness*, pressed

Dieter back still further towards the railing of the bridge while *Dieter, off balance and hindered by his weak leg, gave way. Smiley knew Dieter was hitting him, but the decisive blow never came.* He was shouting at Dieter; "Swine, swine!" and as Dieter receded still further Smiley found his arms free and once more struck at his face with *clumsy, childish blows*" (Call 133; emphasis added).

Although Dieter is killed in this fight, the narrative at this point remains ambiguous about whether Dieter truly loses in a physical combat with Smiley, or is ultimately unwilling to kill his former mentor, the transgression of genre codes in the passage may be again understood in the context of its ironic intertextual response to similar scenes in conventional spy narratives.

In John Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916), for instance, the fight between the hero, Hannay and Stumm, a burly German, is described from the hero's perspective:

I stepped back a pace and gave him my left between the eyes.

For a second he did not realize what had happened, for I don't suppose anyone had dared to lift a hand to him since he was a child. He blinked at me mildly. Then his face grew as red as fire.

"God in heaven," he said quietly. "I am going to kill you" and he flung himself on me like a mountain. I was expecting him and dodged the attack. I was quite calm now, but pretty helpless. The man had a gorilla's reach and could give me at least a couple of stone. He wasn't soft either, but looked as hard as granite. I was only just from hospital and absurdly out of training. He would certainly kill me if he could, and I saw nothing to prevent him.

My only chance was to keep him from getting to grips, for he could have squeezed in my ribs in two seconds. I fancied I was lighter on my legs than him, and I had a good eye. Black Monty at Kimberley had taught me to fight a bit, but there is no art on earth which can prevent a big man in a narrow space from sooner or later cornering a lesser one. That was the danger.

Backwards and forwards we padded on the soft carpet. He had no notion of guarding himself, and I got in a good few blows. (Buchan 104-105)

What is emphatic here is the celebration of the violent struggle as a constituent of masculine power. The spy hero's mythic aura derives at once from his ability to perform his masculinity and to assert his dominance over the alien other:

Then at last he gave me my chance. He half tripped over a little table and his face stuck forward. I got him on the point of the chin, and put every ounce of weight I possessed behind the blow. He crumpled up in a heap and rolled over, upsetting a lamp and knocking a big china jar in two. His head, I remember, lay under the escritoire from which he had taken my passport. (Buchan 104-106)

It is important to note the hero's reference to the passport he must reclaim, for it serves as an assertion of both his identification with the nation, on the one hand, and his mobility and agency on the other.

A similar celebration of violent combat is available in Ian Fleming's *Goldfinger* (1959), where the fight between Bond and the eponymous villain is narrated in the third person:

Goldfinger stood over him, his face fiendish under the yellow light. There was a small automatic dead steady in his hand. Goldfinger reached back his foot and kicked again. Bond lit with a blast of hot rage. He caught the foot and twisted it sharply, almost breaking the ankle. There came a scream from Goldfinger and a crash that shook the plane. Bond leapt for the aisle and threw himself sideways and down on to the heap of body. There was an explosion that burned the side of his face. But then his knee thudded into Goldfinger's groin and his left hand was over the gun.

For the first time in his life, Bond went berserk. With his fists and knees he pounded the struggling body while again and again he crashed his forehead down on to the glistening face. The gun came quavering towards him again. Almost indifferently Bond slashed sideways with the edge of his hand and heard the clatter of metal among the seats. Now Goldfinger's hands were at his throat and Bond's at Goldfinger's. Down, down went Bond's thumbs into the arteries. He threw all his weight forward, gasping for breath. Would he black out before the other man died? Would he? Could he stand the pressure of Goldfinger's strong hands? The glistening moon-face was changing. Deep purple showed through the tan. The eyes began to nicker up. The pressure of the hands on Bond's throat slackened. The hands fell away. (Fleming *Goldfinger* 345-46).

In this passage the spy hero's agency in the destruction of his enemy is never in doubt. Both the hero's willing participation and his expertise in the ritualized violence are foregrounded. Bond performs the ritual of violence in a methodical, but purposeful manner. The narrative emphasizes the physical exertion of combat with minute attention to detail. This fetishization of violence, which has already been demonstrated to be generic to spy fiction, is deliberately subverted in le Carré's novels.

Le Carré's decision to tread what Stefan Kanfer calls "the higher path paved by Eric Ambler and Graham Greene" (Kanfer, "Impudent" 8), also turns him decisively against valorization of espionage, done traditionally either through the depiction of a glamorized protagonist, or through glamorized violence. The transformation of the phrase "good living, sex and violent action"—from a review of Fleming's *Thunderball* (1961), in the *Times Literary Supplement*—into the marketing slogan "sex 'n' violence," to boost sales of the subsequent novels (Palmer "What Makes" 206), helps to put le Carré's resistance in perspective. It is in this context that we may understand his initial description of George Smiley in *Call for the Dead*, which emphasizes the distinct lack of physical attractiveness:

Short, fat and of a quiet disposition, he appeared to spend a lot of money on really bad clothes, which hung about his squat frame like a skin on a shrunken toad. (*Call* 1)

This depiction of Smiley seems more on the lines of Conrad's "fat-pig" secret agent Verloc (Conrad 13), than "the eternally young, athletic, superhuman hero" typified by Bond (Garson "Enter" 73).

Further, the motive for Smiley's involvement is neither the patriotism of Carruthers or Bulldog Drummond, nor the need for adventure that motivates Hannay (Panek 55). What is even more interesting is Smiley's lack of interest in the professional spy's quest for "excitement or money" (Atkins 156). Le Carré repeatedly emphasizes Smiley's academic orientation:

It was a profession he enjoyed, and which mercifully provided him with colleagues equally obscure in character and origin. It also provided him with what he had once loved best in life: academic excursions into the mystery of

human behaviour, disciplined by the practical application of his own deductions. (*Call 2*)

Reference to Smiley's deductive abilities suggests a reorientation of the focus of spying away from action and excitement towards patient ratiocination. This would also explain why both *Call for the Dead* and *A Murder of Quality* (1962), le Carré's second novel, appear to belong more to the tradition of the detective novel (Deblanco "Again" 302-08) than to the action/adventure oriented spy novel. Le Carré's rejection of the action/adventure oriented narrative as a format for his spy novels is underscored by his insistence in *The Russia House* (1989), that "spying is waiting" (*Russia* 344). To the extent that le Carré represents through the character of Smiley a pointed inversion of Fleming's glamorous spy, he seems to offer an instance of parodic resistance of the type. In this context it has been suggested that le Carré's tendency to eschew triumphalism, despite the occasional successes of protagonists like Smiley, reveal that he has been writing "anti thrillers" (Britton 128) rather than anything else. However, it is only in the post Cold War novels that le Carré truly begins to utilize "the permanent corrective of laughter" (Bakhtin 55), in the form of farce and burlesque as a weapon with which to critique the ideological underpinnings of the conventional spy novel.

It must still be maintained, nevertheless, that the Cold War novels are marked by a finely honed irony which conflates the espionage novel with the novel of manners, thereby leading some critics to align le Carré with Evelyn Waugh and Kingsley Amis (Cobbs 112) rather than Fleming, or even, Ambler. One particularly instance of this occurs in Chapter Four of *The Honourable Schoolboy*, where Smiley lands up for dinner at the home of Oliver Lacon, liaison officer between the Circus and the Cabinet. The dinner itself occupies nearly five pages, during which the plot moves minimally, but an unforgettable picture of British upper class snobbery emerges. Smiley is accompanied by Peter Guillam who has offered to chauffeur him, and whose unexpected appearance causes an initial flutter:

They arrived in rain and there was muddle on the doorstep about what to do with the unexpected underling. Smiley insisted that Guillam would make his own way and return at ten-thirty: the Lacons that he *must* stay, there was simply *masses* of food....

So a fourth place was laid, and the overcooked steak was cut into bits till it looked like dry stew, and a daughter was despatched on her bicycle with a pound to fetch a second bottle of wine from the pub up the road. (*Honourable* 87-8)

Le Carré's handling of the dinner scene makes the discussion of Circus plans subordinate to the portrayal of manners. The Lacons appear to epitomize every vice from hypocrisy and bigotry to gauche intemperance:

Mrs Lacon was doe-like and fair and blushing, a child bride who had become a child mother. The table was too long for four. She set Smiley and her husband one end. and Guillam next to her. Having asked him whether he liked madrigals, she embarked on an endless account of a concert at her daughter's private school. She said it was absolutely ruined by the rich foreigners they were taking in to balance the books. Half of them couldn't sing in a Western way at all:

'I mean who wants one's child brought up with a lot of Persians when they all have six wives apiece?' she said.

British racial bigotry, which is so much a part of the heroic spy novel, is savagely satirized in the person of the hostess: "Mrs. Lacon, whose intolerance had a beatific innocence about it, began complaining about Jews" (*Honourable* 88). To make matters worse, Oliver Lacon is guilty of getting drunk, spilling wine on the dinner table, speaking loudly and—rather ill-advisedly— reminding Guillam to drive carefully, since he'd been drinking (*Honourable* 88-92). Once out of earshot, Guillam says "something very rude indeed" (*Honourable* 92). This richness of detail, however, dwindles drastically in the post Cold War novels, as le Carré's prose achieves a sparer, more focused and purposeful reorientation of interests.

3.03 Ideology, the Nation and the Other

When it comes to the question of morals, Fleming's spy James Bond simply skips it, as in *Casino Royale* (1953), where the principal female character asks him about his "license to kill." "It's a confusing business," Bond replies, "but if it's one's profession, one does what one's told. How do you like the grated egg with your caviar?" (Fleming *Casino* 68) Whereas it is possible to gloss this passage as reflecting the spy's reluctance to discuss official secrets, there is a strong internal logic that suggests instead a fundamental unwillingness to introspect on the nature of his calling. In this

novel, the spy just appears to have better things to do. This, in effect returns us to the question of moral ambiguity.

With *le Carré*, introspection and meditation frequently become substitutes for action in the unraveling of plot points. In *Call for the Dead*, Smiley discovers two communists spying for the GDR. One of them, Elsa Fennan, is the wife of a deceased colleague, and the other, Dieter Frey, Head of the East German Steel Mission in London, a former student and beloved protégé from his War time stint in Germany. That both are portrayed as Jews, and survivors of Nazi persecution, may immediately be seen to foreclose any easy construction of “the evil enemy.” Absently examining a group of Dresden china figurines on his mantelpiece leads Smiley to remember his own experience of the city after the War:

It was on that visit that he had caught sight of Dieter Frey, struggling round the prison yard. He could see him still, tall and angry, monstrously altered by his shaven head, somehow too big for that little prison. Dresden, he remembered, had been Elsa’s birthplace. He remembered glancing through her personal particulars at the ministry: Elsa *née* Freimann, born 1917, in Dresden, Germany, of German parents; educated Dresden; imprisoned 1938-1945. He tried to place her against the background of her home, the patrician Jewish family trying to live out its life amid insults and persecution. (*Call* 113-14)

This view, which transfigures the enemy spies into victims of injustice and oppression, may in fact be seen to imply a serious resistance to the prevalent discourse of the Communist/alien other during the Cold War. The scene where Smiley forces a confession from Elsa Fennan, for instance, is fraught with a more disturbing implication, which seems to gradually destabilize the triumph of the spy protagonist:

She went on crying, helpless, and Smiley, half in triumph, half in shame, waited for her to speak again. Suddenly she raised her head and looked at him, the tears still running down her cheeks. “Look at me,” she said; “What dream did they leave me? I dreamed of long golden hair and they shaved my head, I dreamed of a beautiful body and they broke it with hunger. I have seen what human beings are, how could I believe in a formula for human beings? I said to him, oh I said to him a thousand times; 'only make no laws, no fine theories, no judgments, and the people may love, but give them one theory, let them invent one slogan, and the game begins again...’” (*Call*: 95)

The narrator's response to Smiley's response is even more suggestive:

He dared not speak, dared put nothing to the test. (*Call*: 95)

Clearly, Smiley is denied moral victory in this exchange. In a manner that exactly realizes Levinas's theorization, Elsa the eternal Jewish other, "looks up" and returns Smiley's gaze, demanding compassion, undermining the frame of scrutiny. Thus, the narrative may be seen to implicate both the British spy Smiley, and the English nation he represents, in the guilt for her continuing persecution. One further point that may be noted in this passage is the manner in which the generic trope of espionage as a Game (Atkins 132-133) is deflated through ironic reference to an unending cycle of cruelty and suffering.

It must be remembered that Elsa is just one of many sympathetic Jewish characters in le Carré's fiction. From Liz Gold and Fielder, the decent East German Jew, in *Cold* to the would be Nazi hunter Leo Harting in *A Small Town in Germany*, le Carré's may Jewish victims may perhaps be traced back to the character of Lippsie, the best of Magnus Pym's many surrogate mothers in *A Perfect Spy* (1986; hereafter *Perfect*). Annie Lipshitz alias Lippsie is in many ways crucial to an understanding of le Carré's spiritual orientation. The fact that *Perfect* has been acknowledged to be the most autobiographical of le Carré's novels (Cobbs 167; le Carré *Perfect* 9) seems to point to the conclusion that the character is based on le Carré/Cornwell's real-life nanny (Aronoff 226) and mistress to his father Ronnie Cornwell. In the novel Lippsie is a German Jew whose family—represented by silver framed photographs standing "like tiny polished gravestones on her dressing table" (*Perfect* 81)—has apparently perished in the Holocaust, a fact which occasions frequent bouts of depression. She becomes one of the many "lovelies" in the harem of Rick Pym, Magnus's roguish father. After she accepts a position as a part-time teacher and "school dogsbody" (*Perfect* 79) at the privileged boarding school which Magnus attends, she is driven to suicide by Rick's chicanery. She throws herself off the school tower after accusing Rick of having turned into a thief. Magnus, the inheritor of his father's guilt, hides himself in the staff lavatory when Lippsie's body is discovered on the school grounds. Recalled by Magnus as always his "own private moral tutor" (*Perfect* 83), Lippsie represents the lost ethical centre of his being, forever implicated in his concept of virtue, for he cannot imagine Paradise without her (*Perfect* 81). That her virtue, as far as Magnus is

concerned, is necessarily tied up with her victimized status, can be understood from the narrative:

And I believe now that was what I meant to her: a thing to touch and cherish and protect, after everything else had been removed from her. I was her bit of hope and love in the gilded prison where Rick kept her. (*Perfect* 84)

That Magnus, despite his many deceptions, is not entirely devoid of an ethical centre is attested by the Czech spy Poppy (*Perfect* 448). It is this is the ethical centre, incidentally, which reasserts itself at the end of *Perfect* to destroy its deceitful double self, Magnus the arch betrayer (Cobbs 180). The death of Magnus also signals the futility of Rick's dream, which reposes its faith in the power of appearances of birth, privilege and material success to guarantee happiness. Given that this dream defined and described the entire edifice of traditional British society well into the late 20th century, *A Perfect Spy* can be read as a trenchant critique of British culture and society at a critical moment in history.

It would be useful to examine here the presumption of moral/ideological superiority of the western capitalist nation state underpinning the discourse of the Cold War, perhaps best represented by the American spy novelist and commentator William F. Buckley, Jr.:

To say that the CIA and the KGB engage in similar practices is the equivalent of saying that the man who pushes an old lady into the path of a hurtling bus is not to be distinguished from the man who pushes an old lady out of the way of a hurtling bus, on the grounds that, after all, in both cases someone is pushing an old lady around. (Buckley, "Right Word" 84-85)

In this, it may be well to remember that Buckley's resentment of this "ideological egalitarianism" (Buckley, "Terror" 113-116) actually represents a reaction against le Carré's perceived refusal to take sides in the discourse of the Cold War, an attitude Abraham Rothberg articulates as "a plague on both your houses" (Rothberg, "Decline" 62). Jack R. Cohn, in reviewing Barley's *Taking Sides: The Fiction of John le Carré* (1986), underlines the novelist's reluctance or inability to take sides (Cohn, "Watch" 331). However, this view needs to be considered in the light of an alternative position which maintains that le Carré's heroes can actually be seen "breaking the pattern" and committing themselves to ideals like love, justice and integrity as they attempt "to find a human path between clashing extremes" (Panek 241-242). Although Eva Horn would suggest that le Carré's attitude comprises an "erosion of

the political,” (Horn 262), it is necessary to see his refusal to adhere to the national interest ideology of Buchan, Sapper and Fleming is inherently political. It is in this conscious and consistent adoption of an alternative paradigm in spy fiction that he treads the higher path of Maugham and Greene and participates in “the literature of involvement” (Crutchley “Fictional” 6). Nonetheless, we may also note in this instance how genre codes are contaminated by ideological traces, and that resistance to one of these elements may simultaneously involve resistance to the other. The notion of genre, for instance, is saturated with an ideological complex of race, nation and capitalism, all of which are affected by subversion of any genre code.

That le Carré’s resistance at this point is *covert* rather than *overt* (Hollander and Einwohner 533-54), is evident from the bewildered reaction manifest in an early review of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*:

If you choose to take it as more than entertainment, you can only conclude that between Us and Them there is not a ha’porth of moral odds. Which seems to be an odd conclusion to be led to by an author who is, it appears, “a British civil servant employed in one of the Whitehall ministries.” (Cruttwell 306)

And yet, in the light of the assertion that le Carré is the only spy novelist to discuss this aspect of motives (Atkins 155), it is possible to suggest that the extraordinary investment in the exploration of ideological complexity in his spy novels may itself be viewed as resistance to the generic codes of conventional spy fiction.

The fact that Cruttwell’s insistence on the moral/ideology superiority of Us over Them is premised on the imaginary of the enlightened western nation state, especially the British nation state can hardly be overemphasized. Smiley is shown thinking guiltily afterwards that Dieter’s refusal to shoot him has been on account of their old friendship, may be seen to problematize the ideological conflict in terms of a paradoxical statement: tactical victory in the clash of ideologies comes at the cost of ethical failure. Conversely, the ethically superior individual must be resigned to failure. The two aspects of this paradox may be seen illustrated by the climactic scenes from *Smiley’s People* (1979) and *The Spy who Came in from the Cold* respectively.

In *Smiley's People*, which concludes the so called "Quest for Karla" trilogy, the final pages of the novel depicting the eventual defection to the West of Smiley's opposite number in the KGB is fraught with the sense of a victory won at too great an ethical cost. Smiley, who manages this defection by threatening to expose Karla's clandestine use of Soviet resources to pay for the care of his mentally unstable daughter in a Swiss sanatorium, is shown ruining his use of blackmail even as he waits for Karla to cross over to West Berlin at night:

He looked across the river into the darkness again, and an unholy vertigo seized him as the very evil he had fought against seemed to reach out and possess him and claim him despite his striving, calling him a traitor also; mocking him, yet at the same time applauding his betrayal. On Karla has descended the curse of Smiley's compassion; on Smiley the curse of Karla's fanaticism. I have destroyed him with the weapons I abhorred, and they are his. We have crossed each other's frontiers, we are the no-men of this no-man's-land. (*People* 391-392)

It is at this point that Smiley seems to articulate a point fundamental to le Carré's ethical vision, that is, how long the West could continue to defend itself through unethical methods and yet claim to be a community worth defending (Deindorfer "Conversation" 15-17).

Although just moments before the fleetingly realized encounter between these two old adversaries, Smiley is shown recollecting a horrific catalogue of Karla's past crimes, the narrative seems to insist on a disturbing identification between them:

They faced each other; they were perhaps a yard apart, much as they had been in Delhi jail.... They exchanged one more glance and perhaps each for that second did see in the other something of himself. (*People* 393-394)

The reference to the Delhi jail sets up unmistakable resonances between the narrative of *Smiley's People* and events described in the two previous novels— *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974) and *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977). These images, of Smiley facing Karla, across a table (*Tinker* 197-204), Smiley staring fixedly at a framed picture of Karla, (*Honourable* 106), and the final exchange of looks in *People* can be seen to comprise a pattern of mirroring. In Karla, Smiley may be seen confronting his ideological other, who must be respected, because despite the differences, the correspondences between them are too compelling to ignore:

On the other hand, that adversary had acquired a human face of disconcerting clarity. It was no brute whom Smiley was pursuing with such mastery, no unqualified fanatic after all, no automaton. It was a man; and one whose downfall, if Smiley chose to bring it about, would be caused by nothing more sinister than excessive love, a weakness with which Smiley himself from his own tangled life was eminently familiar. (*People* 372)

The fact that Smiley and Karla are but symbolic representatives of conflicting ideologies can be said to defy both the presumption of spiritual superiority and the messianic claims of the Western discourse during the Cold War. When Smiley's loyal lieutenant, Guillam tells Smiley that he has won at the end of *People*, therefore, the latter's response appears to be skeptical: "Did I? .. Yes, yes, I suppose I did" (*People* 395).

The final moments of *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*, on the other hand, may be seen to typify the obverse side of this paradox. Leamas, the cynical British spy at the centre of a tangled web of duplicity and betrayal, and Liz, the unwitting civilian who gets involved, attempt to clamber over the Berlin Wall at night time only to be shot at the last possible minute by the East Germans. Textual clues like Leamas's angry admission to Liz just before their climb that she is now possesses forbidden knowledge regarding the existence of a British double agent in the *Abeleitung* (*Cold* 241), and Liz's own realization about her expendability as a Jew (244), appear to portend her inevitable elimination to protect western interests, rather than those of the walled communities in the East. However, it is in Leamas's deliberate decision to jump down not onto the western side where Smiley waits, but the Communist side where Liz's dead body has fallen, that the inevitable defeat of the ethically superior individual may be seen. As William Boyd argues, Leamas's decision not to come in from the cold as a professional spy is simultaneously a decision to come in to the world of human empathy (Boyd "Rereading" N.p.).

In characters like Leiser and Avery in *The Looking Glass War*, Leo Harting in *A Small Town in Germany* (1968), and Jerry Westerby in *The Honourable Schoolboy*, the eventual betrayal, and defeat or death, of the individual who makes an ethical commitment can be seen becoming a pattern throughout the Cold War novels. The character of George Smiley also may be said to fit into this pattern insofar as he is

shown repeatedly sidelined and forgotten by unscrupulous or incompetent colleagues at the end of every novel in which he features. However, it is in the conflation of these two figures—the ethical superior who is eventually defeated and the protagonist of the spy narrative—that the novels of John le Carré may be seen subverting the genre conventions.

3.04 Ideology and Modernity:

One of the operative elements in the generic conception of the spy is that of an individual working without recourse to the law (Priestman, “Crime” 34). In fact, considered in the light of Agamben’s formulation of the State of Exception, insofar as the spy both represents state authority and simultaneously operates beyond it (Goodman 27). In the case of some of le Carré’s protagonists, like Smiley and the policeman Mendel in *Call* and the Foreign Office investigator Alan Turner in *A Small Town in Germany* not only have recourse to the law, but actually appear to represent it. What is perhaps more significant, for le Carré’s novels in this connection, is the oft depicted disconnect between legal and ethical imperatives. Leamas and Liz in *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*, Leiser and Avery in *The Looking-Glass War*, Leo Harting in *A Small Town in Germany*, Jim Prideaux and Irina in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, and Alexandra/Tatiana in *Smiley’s People* in their different ways may be seen to represent the victims of this fatal disjuncture and its disorienting effects. It is here that we have to remember Berman’s argument regarding modernity; that it simultaneously “promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world- and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (Berman 15). It is possible to argue then that to the extent that the spy is a creature with a fragmented identity, divided allegiances, uncertain motivation unstable actions, s/he is shaped and produced by the “maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (Berman 15). In other words, the spy is a product of modernity.

Crucial to this essentially fragmenting and disorienting experience of modernity is the ubiquity of surveillance and consequent loss of privacy felt by the individual members of the nation state. *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*, arguably le Carré’s best known work, begins with Leamas waiting, armed with a pair o binoculars, tracking

the progress of a couple of his East German agents as they prepare to cross Checkpoint Charlie and enter West Berlin. He is accompanied by German and American security personnel, also intermittently watching through binoculars. It is made clear that the agents are being observed by the East German side as well, for the arc lights are suddenly switched on. First, a woman comes through in a car, and her progress is described twice, one by the novel's omniscient narrator, with a more clinical commentary supplied by attending German military police personnel: "Car halts at the first control. Only one occupant, a woman. Escorted to the Vopo hut for document check" (le Carré *Cold* 3). Next, pushing a bicycle, comes Riemeck, Leamas's exposed spy, who is making a desperate bid to escape. He is not as lucky for the arc lights suddenly go on to catch him like "a rabbit in the headlights of a car" (le Carré *Cold* 6), and following a volley of wildly shouted orders from invisible monitors, he is shot dead by the border guards a few meters inside East German territory. Leamas can only watch helplessly. This entire sequence becomes a metaphoric representation of the fate of the individual in the modern nation state, where surveillance is constant, multipronged, aimed at acquiring power and authority over individuals, and potentially destructive in its intentions. The guard houses on both sides of the checkpoint become, in effect, forms of Bentham's Panopticon. Significantly, even before the lights go on, Riemeck signals his consciousness of the surveillance by suddenly glancing over his shoulder and pedaling faster. Clearly, the surveilled subject modifies his behaviour in response to the perceived surveillance, but to no avail.

That the narrative intent is loaded against both this aspect of surveillance and the ideological battleground that has called into being, is evident from the way the guard houses are juxtaposed with the "the Wall, a dirty, ugly thing of breeze blocks and strands of barbed wire, lit with cheap yellow light, like the backdrop for a concentration camp" (le Carré *Cold* 5).

This theme is mirrored by the novel's final scene, where we find this time Leamas making a bid to escape, accompanied by Liz. Once again, we are presented the same sequence of attempted escape, practiced stealth, converging arc lights, frantically shouted orders by invisible authority and a hail of bullets resulting in the wanton destruction of life. That the loss of life has been pathetic and unjust is suggested by the final image Leamas records before dying, a small car filled with laughing children being crushed between two great lorries (le Carré *Cold* 146). That the knowledge

obtained through surveillance—together with the power that accrues in consequence—is not constrained by national or ideological boundaries can be understood from the thoroughness with which details of Leamas and Liz’s lives in England are discovered and scrutinized during the secret tribunal held in East Berlin. From Smiley’s visit to Liz to the exact course taken by Leamas on his journey to Bywater Street on his release from prison (le Carré *Cold* 209), nothing remains beyond the prying eyes of the spies and surveyors.

Another consequence of the experience of modernity may be discerned in the profusion of broken marriages and relationships in le Carré’s Cold War novels, including those of Smiley, Avery and Jerry Westerby. These relationships, which are all destroyed by pervasive secrecy, betrayal and divided loyalties (Cobbs 68), may be seen to suggest a nightmarish condition where everyone is in a sense a “double agent,” suffering from what John Scaggs calls “a fundamental division of subjectivity” (Scaggs 119). It hardly needs further iteration that the nightmarish condition Scaggs refers to is indistinguishable from the maelstrom of disintegration and renewal that Berman cites as a hallmark of modernity. This reading is in fact consistent with the view that le Carré deals with the intelligence services as a metaphor for human life as a whole (Rothberg 55). The spy, especially in le Carré’s fiction, becomes a cipher for the average individual in the modern world, divided by claims upon his consciousness and his conscience, destabilized by contending ideologies and doomed by conflicting allegiances. To the extent that this destabilization of subjectivity and its attendant disorientation have been considered intrinsic to the experience of modernity (Berman 15), the novels of John le Carré may be seen as critiques of modernity itself.

3.05 Ideology, Race, and Empire

Whereas the spy novel as a generic text seems to have been saturated in the discourse of imperialism and racism (Denning 14; Thompson 85), le Carré’s Cold War novels provide a radically different perspective. Since the spy narrative in the early 1960s is seen to have served as an “imaginative outlet for a historically blocked jingoism” (Bennett and Woolacott, “Moments” 19) and perhaps more significantly, as “a compensatory myth for the crisis of imperialism” (Denning 39), an examination of le

Carré's Cold war novels may be seen to important clues to significant deviations within the genre.

While Denning's explication may be seen to hold good for the conventional spy narrative centered on the fantasy figure of the Bond-Quiller type, it may be argued that several instances of ironic reference to the subject in le Carré's Cold War novels seem to invalidate the camouflage thesis. The narrative of *Tinker*, for instance, contains the following ironic passage, revealing Smiley's— and, by implication, le Carré's—view of the upper class Englishman Bill Haydon, who like the real life Kim Philby, is revealed as a Soviet spy lodged high in the echelons of the Circus:

He saw with painful clarity an ambitious man born to the big canvas, brought up to rule, divide and conquer, whose visions and vanities all were fixed, like Percy's, upon the world's game; for whom the reality was a poor island with scarcely a voice that would carry across the water. (*Tinker* 321)

This would rather seem to bear out Leroy Panek's contention that le Carré depicts “an enervated Britain reeling from its fall from international power and its own internal problems” (Panek 236), a theme seen elsewhere too, in contemporary English Literature..

As opposed to the magic figure of the secret agent (Denning 29), capable of performing heroic tasks of world historical significance, and restoring the balance of power in favour of western capitalism, le Carré's novels are filled with doomed and ineffectual spies, in effect, a number of anti-spies. This catalogue would include, apart from Leamas, Leiser, an ageing relic of World War II, who is sent to die in an ill conceived mission inside East Germany in *The Looking Glass War*; Jim Prideaux, who is betrayed by Haydon and shot in the back by the Russians in Czechoslovakia in *Tinker, Tailor Soldier Spy*; Magnus Pym, who commits suicide after a lifetime of deception and self delusion in *The Perfect Spy*; and the English actress Charlie, who agrees to spy for the Israelis and barely survives, a psychological wreck in *The Little Drummer Girl*. The celebration of individual agency in conventional spy fiction (Denning 29) is replaced in le Carré's fiction with a parodic inversion that consistently shows that individualism ensures only existential anguish and empty theatricality. (Beene, “le Carré” N. p.)

It must be remembered that all these lost characters are shown to be field agents, or counterparts of Fleming's James Bond. Smiley, the office based bureaucratic civil servant, on the other hand, corresponds to Bond's supervisor "M" in Fleming's fiction. Britain's relegation to the margins of the international politics and political discourse can be seen most pointedly depicted through Jerry Westerby, Smiley's field agent in *The Honourable Schoolboy*, which is set in 1975, at the height of the Vietnam War. After being dispatched to the Crown colony of Hong Kong, Jerry traverses the South-East Asia, eventually arriving at a US occupied air base in Thailand, immediately after the fall of Saigon. The encounter between the British spy and the American commander of the air base is rendered thus:

'Mr Westerby, sir?'

'Yes, old boy.'

Masters held out his hand.

'Old boy, I want you to shake me by the hand.'

The hand stuck between them, thumb upward.

'What for?' said Jerry.

'I want you to extend the hand of welcome, sir,' The United States of America has just applied to join the club of second class powers, of which I understand your own fine nation to be chairman, president and oldest member. Shake it!'

(*Honourable* 435)

Through the physical and metaphoric linking of the two perplexed representatives of western capitalism in this scene, le Carré can be seen hinting at the ultimate futility of all Western colonial projects across the globe. The death of Jerry Westerby in the novel, killed by a Circus agent when he chooses to pursue his romantic attachment with Lizzie Worthington, becomes emblematic of the eventual destiny of the Western romance of empire. The Circus, like its representative Westerby, is ultimately depicted as irrelevant in the ragged fringes of the once great empire. Smiley and his Circus return to London empty handed, the object of all their efforts snatched away at the last moment by American troops. The close parallels of tone, temper and setting between Greene's *The Quiet American* (1955) and le Carré's *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977; hereafter *Honourable*) extend sufficiently to include a pronounced anti-American bias as a common element in both (Thomson 189; Sauerberg 106). Perhaps more than Greene, who wrote a couple of decades earlier, le Carré has reason to be appalled by "the ten year spectacle of the United States napalming peasant

villages and playing “kneesies” at the bargaining table with Vietnamese political scum like Key and Thieu...” (Cobbs 128). Indeed, in his works after *Honorable*, le Carré’s attitude towards the ‘Cousins’ or members of the Central Intelligence Agency as representatives of American geopolitical interests appears permanently scarred and embittered.

The dubious nature of the collusion between Britain, the former imperial power, and the now ascendant United States is signaled well ahead of the smash-and-grab operation at the end of the novel. The uneasy nature of the Circus’s alliance with the CIA “Cousins”, even before the discovery of Haydon’s treachery, is ironically captured thus:

Before the fall, studiously informal meetings of intelligence partners to the special relationship were held as often as monthly and followed by what Smiley’s predecessor Alleline had liked to call ‘a jar’. If it was the American turn to play host, then Alleline and his cohorts, among them the popular Bill Haydon, would be shepherded to a vast rooftop bar, known within the Circus as the planetarium, to be regaled with dry martinis and a view of West London they could not otherwise have afforded. If it was the British turn, then a trestle table was set up in the rumpus room, and a darned damask tablecloth spread over it, and the American delegates were invited to pay homage to the last bastion of clubland spying, and incidentally the birthplace of their own service, while they sipped South African sherry disguised by cut-glass decanters on the grounds that they wouldn’t know the difference. For the discussions, there was no agenda and by tradition no notes were taken. Old friends had no need of such devices, particularly since hidden microphones stayed sober and did the job better. (*Honourable* 257-258)

Whereas Lars Ole Sauerberg suggests that the passage helps to illustrate the difference between the economic capabilities of the two intelligence services (Sauerberg 185), it may also be seen to underscore the envy, condescension and suspicion underlying the apparent camaraderie of the “special relationship” between the Circus and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Considered in the light of this simmering mutual distrust, the so called exfiltration assignment by the better equipped Americans in the final chapters of the novel hardly comes as a surprise.

John L. Cobbs suggests that in le Carré's virtuoso panorama of South East Asia as a melting pot that does not melt, *The Honourable Schoolboy* evinces the influence of Kipling's *Kim* (Cobbs 129). In fact, it does so, but only through parody and ironic allusion. However, where Kipling's tale seeks to project the Orient as a mythic terrain with its immense diversity permanently integrated by a benevolent empire, le Carré's novel insistently foregrounds the restive aspects of the colonial experience that defy the homogenizing efforts of imperialism. As Peter Wolfe declares, "Nearly everyone in the book is maimed or marred; everyone also feels either on the run or caught in a losing battle" (Wolfe 199). The negative depiction of the imperial project is perfectly realized through an interior monologue assigned to Craw, an elderly British spy working as a journalist:

'We colonise them, your Graces, we corrupt them, we exploit them, we bomb them, sack their cities, ignore their culture and confound them with the infinite variety of our religious sects. We are hideous not only in their sight, Monsignors, but in their nostrils as well - the stink of the roundeye is abhorrent to them and we're too thick even to know it...'" (*Honourable* 191)

Nothing, therefore, in le Carré fiction, could be further from the imperialistic assumptions underlying a conventional spy novel.

In *The Honourable Schoolboy* the constructed nature of "the Orient" is constantly, albeit subtly, emphasized, and every landscape is suffused with the consciousness of absence: of understanding, kindness, happiness or justice. This is brought home powerfully in a scene where Jerry is shown travelling in a taxi through the suburbs of Phnom Penh in the company of a young American woman:

The girl Lorraine was at the window, staring at the rain.

'I don't see any kids, Max,' she announced. 'You said to look out for no kids, that's all. Well I've been watching and they've disappeared.' The driver stopped the car. 'It's raining and I read somewhere that when it rains Asian kids like to come out and play. So, you know, where's the kids?' she said. But Jerry wasn't listening to what she'd read.

(*Honourable* 327)

Le Carré's layered narrative may be seen to communicate several things at once; the absence of the children conveys not only the disorienting sense of an unnatural community inhabiting a permanent war zone, but also the unavoidable recognition of

western culpability in its constitution. At a deeper level, the passage may be seen to indicate le Carré's extraordinary sensitivity to the nature of the Orientalist discourse and the imperial gaze. The imperialistic gaze presumes a comprehensive knowledge of the Orient, and therefore, the nature and identity of the "Asian" children have already been constructed in absentia. What is even more important is that the absent Asian children have in fact been rendered visible by le Carré's narrative, together with a host of ethical questions such absence entails. It is in this strategic exploration of the hegemonic impulses underlying human misery that le Carré may be seen to subvert and resist the ideology of imperialism latent in spy fiction.

Indeed, it is possible at this point to argue that the strategy of rendering the other visible can be seen here as a surreptitious theme, which evolves into a major preoccupation of le Carré's post-Cold War novels. The muted treatment of this theme is perhaps best illustrated in a scene from *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, which records the first meeting between Smiley and Karla (known by his cover name Gerstmann at this time), inside a Delhi jail:

I also knew from the American observation reports that Gerstmann was a chain-smoker: Camels. I sent out for several packs of them—'packs' is the American word?—and I remember feeling very strange as I handed money to a guard. I had the impression, you see, that Gerstmann saw something symbolic in the transaction of money between myself and the Indian. I wore a money belt in those days. I had to grope and peel off a note from a bundle. Gerstmann's gaze made me feel like a fifth-rate imperialist oppressor. (*Tinker* 102)

Smiley's discomfort is once again emblematic of Britain's uneasy transition into the postcolonial condition. His intuitive recognition of Karla as his mirror image forces his gaze back upon himself, compelling him to assume responsibility for the overwhelming history of imperial injustice. And yet there remains a crucial little coda to this postcolonial encounter between Britain and its Oriental other, which has thus far escaped the notice of scholars:

Finally, back came the guard with the cigarettes, armfuls of them, and dumped them with a clatter on the iron table. I counted the change, tipped him, and in doing so again caught the expression in Gerstmann's eyes; I fancied I read amusement there, but really I was no longer in a state to tell. *I noticed that the*

boy refused my tip; I suppose he disliked the English. (Tinker 102; emphasis added)

Smiley is disoriented, “no longer in a state to tell”, but perceptive enough to record that the Indian resents being taken for granted by the Englishman. The Other looks back at the European subject, and the effect of the returned gaze destabilizes the relationship between European and the world. It is impossible to miss the intertextual resonance with parallel scenes such as the one in Buchan’s *Greenmantle*, where a Turkish policeman picks up a cigar thrown at him by Hannay’s American friend, and gratefully places it under his cap (Buchan 194). Once again the discourse of the Oriental Other—the pliable, submissive native—is exposed and deflated with deceptive casualness, and in the process the marginal Other is transformed into a compelling presence. Yet, to appreciate the radical nature of le Carré’s departure from the imperialist ideology and the discourse of the other, it is perhaps necessary to locate it in its proper historical context.

Ian Fleming, in his travelogue *Thrilling Cities* (1963; hereafter *Thrilling*), describes his feelings even as his plane prepares to land in Bombay (Mumbai) on his only visit to India: “From now on, we shall be in the land of baksheesh, squeeze and graft, which rule from the smallest coolie to the Mr. Bigs in government” (Fleming, *Thrilling* 9). India, in this perspective, remains inseparable from the image constituted by the discourse of the Oriental other. Fleming’s attitude presupposes an unvarying notion of India now mired even deeper in a cycle of incompetence and corruption, because it has been cast adrift from the security of its imperial moorings. It is difficult not to see in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, le Carré’s pointed rejection of this outmoded discourse and the persistent romance of empire in which it happens to be steeped.

But the gaze returned by the other, also constitutes an image no less mythic than the one constructed by the subject. Le Carré ironically contrasts the mythic image of the Englishman, which the long history of imperialism has helped to create, with its objective reality. This is evident, for example in a letter written by a Russian woman to a British spy in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, providing the first inkling of Haydon’s treachery:

Thomas, I tell you this because, since I love you, I have decided to admire all English, you most of all. I do not wish to think of an English gentleman

behaving as a traitor, though naturally I believe he was right to join the workers' cause. (*Tinker* 70-1)

Part of this ironic reminder about the fundamental disconnect between the foreigner's notion of the 'English gentleman' and its duplicitous counterpart in reality hinges on the knowledge that "Thomas" is a "legend;" a fictional identity adopted by spies. The fact that "Thomas" is actually Ricky Tarr, a half-Australian 'Circus' employee who establishes a relationship with the woman only for operational convenience, makes for a double deception of the trusting woman. Tarr is another field agent who functions as a parodic inversion of genre conventions, as the following exchange between Smiley and Tarr might show:

"Did you photograph it?"

"I don't carry a camera. I bought a dollar notebook. I copied the diary into the notebook. The original I put back. The whole job took me four hours flat."

(*Tinker* 72)

Unlike James Bond, Tarr does not get to carry many gadgets. Also, unlike Bond, Tarr's motives and methods are revealed to be entirely ambiguous:

"Why didn't you use one of your Swiss escapes?"

Another wary pause.

"Or did you lose them when your hotel room was searched?"

Guillam said, "He cached them as soon as he arrived in Hong Kong. Standard practice."

"So why didn't you use them?"

"They were numbered, Mr. Smiley. They may have been blank but they were numbered. I was feeling a mite windy, frankly. If London had the numbers, maybe Moscow did, too, if you take my meaning." (*Tinker* 73-4)

Tarr's hesitation, paranoia, duplicity, and even cowardice are all suggested throughout this passage, thus underscoring the reprehensible aspects of espionage. However, the final rejection of the Bond figure occurs shortly thereafter:

"He also loves England," Guillam explained with mordant sarcasm.

"Sure. I got homesick." (*Tinker* 75)

Where Bond is suave, witty and patriotic, Tarr, le Carré's parodic British spy, is too dense even to understand sarcasm. The identification between the devious mind of the spy and the duplicitous Englishman is a running joke throughout le Carré's fiction. In an ironic reversal unparalleled in spy fiction, le Carré's work pits this inverted image

of a degenerate English race against a host of sympathetic representations of the other, members of ethnic minority groups, often locating these not at the fringes of its former empire, but in neglected spaces in the heart of a shrunken Great Britain. Jost Hindersmann suggests that le Carré “investigates what it means to be British in the second half of the twentieth century.” (Hindersmann, “Right Side” 25-37)

These representations, all impelled into action by the consciousness of their own otherness to the discourse of the English nation, include Leiser in *The Looking Glass War*, Leo Harting in *A Small Town in Germany*, the Fennans in *Call Fall the Dead*, and Max in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. Leiser, as a wartime Polish immigrant is shown to be motivated by nothing other than his loneliness and desire to belong (Cobbs 69). Leo Harting’s lonely crusade against Karfield, is inextricably linked to his Jewish identity. What makes him doubly alienated from his English superiors in Bonn, is not only that he is a German Jew, but also that he presumes to remember Nazi atrocities. As Bradfield explains to the investigator:

“He has offended,” he added casually, as if passing the topic once more in review. “Yes. He has. Not as much against myself as you might suppose. But against the order that results from chaos; against the built-in moderation of an aimless society. He had no business to hate Karfield and none to.... He had no business to remember. If you and I have a purpose at all anymore it is to save the world from such presumptions.” (*Small* 292)

In le Carré’s singular vision, ethical superiority is invariably vested in the Other. Conversely, the cynicism of the British embassy serves to subvert the entire tradition of spy fiction where the diplomatic English heroes of Le Queux and Oppenheim embarked on moral missions to protect the future of European civilization (Atkins 46).

There are also those who appear less favoured by narratorial sympathy, perhaps because their desperation to belong has transformed them into arch conformists. Among these we may find Toby Easterhase, who climbs to the highest echelons of the Circus in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, despite his Hungarian extraction. Roy Bland, in the same novel, on the other hand, is relegated to the category of the other on account of his working class background. Bland is the son of a staunchly trade-unionist

dockworker, who believed that his academically oriented son had been “lost to the ruling classes, and beat the life out of him” (le Carré *Tinker* 149). Bland’s rise up the class-ridden echelons of the Circus is shown to be fraught with struggle and the odd nervous breakdown (le Carré *Tinker* 150). On the other hand, Alan Bold has noted le Carré’s depiction of the Circus as a closed, clannish world of public school educated males (Bold 35). The fact that le Carré here articulates the politics of class in England, thus revealing the hidden fissures within British society while opening it up for political and intellectual intervention, in a way, exposes the narrative as a class conscious text. As in Lukács’s polemics, one finds in le Carré repeated articulations of class as a factor in social organization and mobilization in Britain. While it has been argued that popular writing can incorporate complex intellectual acts of resistance, the case of le Carré’s bestselling spy novels demonstrates how “class conscious” literature provides the bulwark for resistance to class and ideology.

One relatively minor but thematically significant instance may also be seen in Max, who explains the aftermath of Haydon’s betrayal to Smiley:

This time it was the white hands that told him. Smiley saw the spread of fingers, five on one hand, four on the other and already he felt the sickness before Max spoke.

“So they shoot Jim from behind. Maybe Jim was running away, what the hell? They put Jim in prison. That’s not so good for Jim. For my friends also. Not good.” He started counting: “Pribyl,” he began, touching his thumb. “Bukova Mirek, from Pribyl’s wife the brother,” he took a finger. “Also Pribyl’s wife,” a second finger. A third: “Kolin Jiri. Also his sister, mainly dead. This was network Aggravate.” He changed hands. “After network Aggravate come network Plato. Come lawyer Rapotin, come Colonel Landkron, and typists Eva Krieglova and Hanka Bilova. Also mainly dead. That’s damn big price, George”—holding the clean fingers close to Smiley’s face—“that’s damn big price for one Englishman with bullet-hole.” He was losing his temper. “Why you bother, George? Circus don’t be no good for Czecho. (*Tinker* 237-238)

This graphic recounting of the human cost of espionage and betrayal can be seen to interrogate the basic assumptions of the Great Game mythology that spy fiction putatively partakes of. What is also being suggested here is that neither the heroic self image of the British spy nor the nation he represents bears close scrutiny. Behind the

figure of Max, who is other to the English nation, on account of his heavy Slav accent, among other things, are numerous other faces, all made disturbingly visible.

Yet, Max remains a marginal figure not only to the English society and nation, but in the narrative as well. The fullest foregrounding of alterity may be seen in the le Carré's *The Little Drummer Girl*, where the narrative interest is shifted radically to focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict; a terrain that is at once geo-politically and psychologically marginal to the Cold War discourse. However, the continuing pattern of focus on the marginal may be seen to provide a fundamental consistency of narrative intent. The major characters, including a woman, a couple of Israeli spies and a group of Palestinian extremists, attest to the strategic consistency. *The Little Drummer Girl* is also remarkable insofar as it is the first articulation of sympathy towards the Palestinian cause by an established writer in the West (Cobbs 193). The same narrative empathy with the Other may be discerned in the rendering of Palestinian characters:

Kareem was plump and clownish, and made a great show of regarding his machine gun as a dead weight, puffing and grimacing whenever he was obliged to shoulder it. But when she smiled at him in sympathy he became flustered and hurried away to join Yasir. His ambition was to become an engineer. He was nineteen and had been fighting six years. He spoke English in a whisper and put "use to" with almost every verb.... Yes, Kareem agreed politely, he use to have a brother and a sister, but his sister had died in a Zionist air attack on the camp at Nabatiyeh. His brother was moved to Rashidiyeh Camp and died in a naval bombardment three days later. He described these losses modestly, as if they ranked low in the general tragedy. (*Drummer* 402)

This process of voicing and rendering the other visible becomes even more effective possibly because of two qualities associated with le Carré the writer: a gift for capturing the idiosyncrasies of everyday speech (Cobbs 129), and a highly developed skill for gallows humour (Wolfe 17):

"Soon we shall all use to be dead," Kareem told her, echoing Tayeh. "The Zionists will genocide us to death, you will use to see." (*Drummer* 403)

Passages such as these, which manage to convey the pathos of lives wasted at the margins of Western consciousness, yet stopping just short of outright exoticization,

may serve to indicate the ethical compass le Carré follows. Although the narrative might evince a partisan position if considered on the basis of isolated passages such as these, scholars insist on a “balance of evil” in the novel (Cobbs 155). Despite the presence of intrigue, suspense and violence at the centre of the narrative, the novel has been read as being either thesis driven, that is, aimed at drumming up sympathy for the Palestinian cause, or to remain character driven, with varying degrees of success in delineation (Bloom 4).

Strategic deviations such as the accent on thesis and character, rather than on suspenseful action on the one hand, and the diversion of narrative focus towards the margins of the discourse of empire and nation on the other, serve to alert readers to the way in which le Carré critiques and subverts both the discourse of the other and the ideology of empire it helps to create and perpetuate.

3.06 Ideology and Market Civilization

One other aspect of ideology that le Carré may be seen to resist in his Cold war novels is the hegemony of the “market civilization” (Gill 57) and the concomitant discourse which Western consumer capitalism generates. Here, for example, is a series of densely suggestive images, at work that can be said to connect the ideology of imperialism at once with military expansionism and consumer capitalism:

An army convoy drove at them, headlights on, sticking to the centre of the road. The taxi-driver obediently pulled in to the dirt. An ambulance brought up the rear, both doors open. The bodies were stacked feet outward, legs like pigs’ trotters, marbled and bruised. Dead or alive, it scarcely mattered. They passed a cluster of stilt houses smashed by rockets, and entered a provincial French square: a restaurant, an épicerie, a charcuterie, advertisements for Byrrh and Coca-Cola. On the kerb, children squatted, watching over litre wine-bottles filled with stolen petrol. Jerry remembered that too: that was what had happened in the shellings. The shells touched off the petrol and the result was a blood-bath. It would happen again this time. Nobody learned anything, nothing changed, the offal was cleared away by morning. (*Honourable* 332)

This collage may be seen to connect the army convoy with corpses of those already dead and those who are doomed. The passage is an illustrative detritus of imperialism, expansionism and capitalism. Ironically, the ones most likely to die soon are the

children on the roadside. But it is the thematic connection between the advertisement for American soft drinks and the little children peddling their lethal wares that suggests both the pervasive and destructive aspects of consumer capitalism. The destruction of local markets by multinational trading is also implicit here, as is the ironic connection between the two potent markers of international commerce: oil and coke. The devastation and the sense of cluttered space suggest the Oriental war zone, whereas the mention of the French quarter and Coca Cola constitute obtrusive alien presences. The Coke label as a metaphor for pervasive consumer capitalism as well as the image of cultural ghettos may be seen to recur throughout le Carré's fictional landscape. Towards the end of *People*, where Smiley and his troops wait by the Berlin wall, readers may observe the following description:

The café was in the Turkish quarter because the Turks are now the poor whites of West Berlin, and property is worst and cheapest near the Wall. Smiley and Guillam were the only foreigners. At a long table sat a whole Turkish family, chewing flat bread and drinking coffee and Coca-Cola. The children had shaven heads and the wide, puzzled eyes of refugees. Islamic music was playing from an old tape-recorder. Strips of coloured plastic hung from the hardboard arch of an Islamic doorway. (*People* 386)

Yet another aspect of the postcolonial, post-industrial detritus is presented here. As opposed to the French quarter in Phnom Penh, there is the Turkish quarter in Germany, and le Carré's ironic vision registers both. But transcending the walls—visible and invisible—that communities and states erect, there is the ubiquitous bottle of Coca Cola that penetrates every doorway. As Karla comes in from the cold and the Cold War draws to a close, le Carré's prescient narrative vision appears to close on the two images around which a new ideological battleground might develop: Coca Cola and the cosy, enclosed space behind the arched Islamic doorway. Such an accretion of significant details, which provide an accurately recorded explanation, elaboration and catalogue of consumer culture, it may be argued, is not only an indicator of le Carré's resistance at work, but also suggestive of his distance from conventional spy fiction. It may further be argued that le Carré's vision affords a prescient insight into the emergence of a transcendent globalized capitalistic power which Hardt and Negri describe as Empire. Le Carré's attitude of resistance to unbridled consumer capitalism may be seen developing unto an even more pronounced thematic concern in the post-Cold War novels.

One vital difference that separates le Carré's Cold War novels from the conventional spy novel is in the depiction of women. Unlike the case of the conventional Bond style spy fiction, where the presence of women fulfils a mandatory generic requirement to provide an image of pliant and willing bodies where the readers through the hero may vicariously experience sexual gratification. The women who surround the Bond type spy hero are stereotypes of sexually and intellectually submissive femininity, dedicated to the pleasure of the spy hero.. In le Carré's fiction, on the other hand, the spy has to engage with women who are contradictory, questioning defiant and sometimes resolutely deviant. Anne Smiley's compulsive adultery is a perennial theme of the Cold War novels. In *The Looking Glass War*, Avery's wife Sarah is shown challenging her husband over his obsessive secrecy and the demands his job seems to make on their relationship: "Don't swear at me! I should be swearing at you and your beastly Department! ... John, I don't even know its name!" (*Looking* 119). Connie Sachs, the research expert on Soviet intelligence who assists Smiley in the Karla novels, opts for a lesbian relationship with a younger partner.

A final point of departure involves recurring motif of children and family in the spy's life. It may be seen that le Carré's spies are rarely people without domestic responsibilities. Smiley is frequently distracted by his unfaithful wife; Jerry Westerby is distracted by his teenage daughter, as is Karla. Avery's marriage breaks down on account of his obsession with the secret world he inhabits. The spies of John le Carré, in other words, manage to function as credible human beings –as opposed to the robotic perfection of Bond type figures—because they are humanized by the social and domestic roles they are required to perform. A case in point might be a scene from *Looking* in which two intelligence officials go to inform the family of a colleague about his death while on duty:

The door opened a few inches and Avery saw a child, a frail, pallid rag of a girl not above ten years old. She wore steel-rimmed spectacles, the kind Anthony wore. In her arms, its pink limbs splayed stupidly about it, its painted eyes staring from between fringes of ragged cotton, was a doll. Its daubed mouth was lolling open, its head hung sideways as if it were broken or dead. It is called a talking doll, but no living thing uttered such a sound.

"Where is your mother?" asked Leclerc. His voice was aggressive, frightened.

The child shook her head. "Gone to work."

"Who looks after you, then?"

She spoke slowly as if she were thinking of something else. "Mum comes back teatimes. I'm not to open the door."

"Where is she? Where does she go?"

"Work."

"Who gives you lunch?" Leclerc insisted.

"What?"

"Who gives you dinner?" Avery said quickly.

"Mrs. Bradley. After school."

Then Avery asked, "Where's your father?" and she smiled and put a finger to her lips. "He's gone on an airplane," she said. "To get money. But I'm not to say. It's a secret."

Neither of them spoke. "He's bringing me a present," she added.

"Where from?" said Avery.

"From the North Pole, but it's a secret." She still had her hand on the doorknob. "Where Father Christmas comes from." (*Looking* 50)

Le Carré offers here a counter-image of heroism through death and glory by inserting elements of the unheroic or anti-heroic. The ironic narrative underscores the predicament of relations left vulnerable by the death of the spy. What is resisted and subverted in this scene is the image of the flag bearing jingoism which underlies much of generic spy fiction. The frequent and destabilizing encroachment of uncomfortable reality into the world of le Carré's novels constitute another aspect of his resistance to and transgressing of the basic assumptions of spy fiction. In the novels of John le Carré, the story does not end when the spy dies in the performance of a heroic act. Frequently, as in *Looking*, it is the point when other, more compellingly human stories begin.

The spy novels of John le Carré, therefore, can be said to exhibit a) a self-conscious engagement with complex social issues through his spy novels, b) a rejection of convenient and conventional resolutions to spiritual and ideological conflicts, c) a transparent narratorial strategy of foregrounding the other, and d) the formulation of an alternative ethical paradigm of life affirming action (Monaghan "Description")

118). Considered in the light of this complex of resistive practices, le Carré may be said to depart decisively from the generic codes of spy fiction.